CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.757
27 February 1997

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SEVENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Thursday, 27 February 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Grecu (Romania)

GE.97-60292 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 757th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, I should like to extend a warm welcome to the newly appointed representative of Cuba, Ambassador Carlos Amat Fores, who is attending the Conference for the first time. I wish to assure him of our cooperation and support.

Towards the end of this plenary, I shall invite the Conference to consider the requests of Luxembourg and Kyrgyzstan to participate as observers in its work, in accordance with the rules of procedure, without first going through an informal plenary.

I have on my list of speakers for today the representative of Slovakia. I now give the floor to Ambassador Mária Krásnohorská.

Mrs. KRÁSNOHORSKÁ (Slovakia): Mr. President, please allow me to commence by congratulating you on the assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. It is a great pleasure to see a fellow representative of the Central European region in this office. I can assure you of my delegation's full support for your endeavours.

I should also like to pay a special tribute to your distinguished predecessor, Ambassador Joun Yung Sun, who spared no effort in looking for solutions and generally acceptable compromises in order to formulate the CD's agenda for 1997. If I may use his expression, he "left no stone unturned", and at last, thanks to his diplomatic skills and hard work, he found the right solution.

At the same time, I should like to extend my warm feelings to the Secretary-General of the Conference Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, his deputy Mr. Bensmail, and their staff, as well as the interpreters, for their valuable support and services. Lastly, I want to welcome the newly arrived colleagues and wish them all the best in their work and private life in Geneva.

I believe the positions of my country on the agenda and the practical work programme of the CD are quite clear. They have been made public several times by my delegation, as well as by the coordinator of the Eastern European Group at the Presidential consultations. Therefore I have so far felt no need to speak on the discussed issues. Nevertheless, we always honour the wishes of the CD Presidents. My statement today is therefore a reaction to your predecessor's appeal to all delegations which have not spoken yet during this session.

As usually happens after important achievements by international bodies, the crossroads represents a major challenge. The challenge requests of all the participants to analyse the past and look into the future with a certain distance and political wisdom. The Slovak delegation has followed the discussions on the CD agenda and work programme with great attention. Unfortunately, the progress seemed to be quite slow and painstaking, the

(Mrs. Krásnohorská, Slovakia)

positions of some delegations rather inflexible. We have sometimes been concerned by the spirit of non-confidence and, from time to time, confrontation. My country believes that mutual confidence, pragmatism and concentration on the issues that join us rather than those that separate us is the only way to proceed.

Slovakia many times spoke in favour of a modernized agenda. Unfortunately, it was not possible to reach consensus on its modernization at the present stage. We therefore supported the path suggested by the President and fully accepted the modified 1996 agenda as the "lowest common denominator". It is less than we wished but we fully realize how much effort the President invested in this affair. At the same time we have believed that the adoption of the agenda for 1997 is a fundamental prerequisite for the further work of the CD. Now we are, thanks to Ambassador Yung Sun, better off. Nevertheless, we are not over the water yet. The issue of the CD's work programme is no less contentious than the agenda. On the contrary, my delegation believes that especially the discussion on the working programme will verify the flexibility, readiness to compromise and political wisdom of its participants. In the heat of the debates we should remember that international public opinion is watching the CD proceedings very closely. The expectations are far from being low. The CD, as the only multilateral negotiating body on the issues of arms control and disarmament, should better meet them. It has no right to freeze all substantial progress due to a deadlock.

Special have been also the expectations of the Slovak Republic, which worked so hard to assume the post liberated by the former Czecho-Slovakia. It would be disappointing to start year 1997 by dragging consultations and postponement of the work on real problems that go beyond the walls of this room and concern millions of people. Let us get down to this work.

I have used this floor several times to express Slovakia's concerns about linkages being introduced between substantial elements of the CD's work. We still believe that such linkages are not likely to be helpful - on the contrary, there is a realistic threat that they will be counter-productive and endanger progress even on those items where it is possible.

Now, Mr. President, let me kindly share with you some comments and remarks on the subject of the CD's work programme. I want to re-emphasize that the CD is the only global arms control and disarmament negotiating body. It has therefore to deal with the most pressing issues. We believe that today these issues are the question of nuclear weapons on the one hand and conventional weapons on the other. The intensive consultations led by your distinguished predecessor Ambassador Yung Sun showed that within these two fields there are at least three issues commanding quite broad support, namely the fissile material cut-off, nuclear disarmament and the complex issue of anti-personnel landmines. Slovakia believes that the CD should concentrate on these issues.

After the completion and adoption of the CTBT, the CD should continue to play its primordial role. When looking for ways on how to meet this task in

(Mrs. Krásnohorská, Slovakia)

the field of nuclear weapons, we should start by the implementation of the "Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament". In Slovakia's view, the CD should concentrate on the negotiations on the fissile material cut-off treaty as a further logical step on the path of nuclear disarmament. We believe that the FMCT ad hoc committee should be re-established without further delay. Special Coordinator Ambassador Shannon's mandate can serve as the basis of the ad hoc committee's work. The mandate is broad enough to meet all legitimate concerns.

In our view the CD should, at the same time, start a discussion in order to explore what further role it could play in nuclear disarmament and to identify the specific issues on which it could embark. An extensive and complex discussion on this issue is a prerequisite and should carefully lay the ground for eventual negotiations.

Concerning conventional weapons, in recent years it has become a cliché to state that since the Second World War, conventional weapons have taken a tremendous toll on human life. In the stricken countries regional or local conflicts caused disruption of States, their economies and social structures and often led to unprecedented humanitarian crises. One of the modern plagues causing this disaster are anti-personnel landmines. The reason is the incredibly high number of indiscriminately laid mines. Unfortunately, mines are inexpensive, easy to produce and use and their life-span is very long. On the contrary, mine-clearing is a very demanding and risky activity. Slovakia welcomed the international community's understanding of the growing humanitarian crisis and the start of action. In 1994 the Slovak Government confirmed that Slovakia does not produce any mines and, also in 1994, adopted a moratorium of unlimited duration on all transfers. Slovakia has participated in the multilateral efforts from the very beginning by co-sponsoring the relative United Nations General Assembly resolutions and supporting the strengthening of Protocol II to the CCW. Since last year it has also taken part in the Ottawa Process. I therefore believe that it will be no surprise if I reconfirm our interest in the landmines issue. We are of the opinion that the strengthening process of the CCW did not meet expectations. The problem of landmines has become so grave that every suitable possibility and forum is to be made use of, including the CD, for the promotion of the issue. Especially, if we are interested in the realization of a global and effective ban on anti-personnel landmines, supported by a simple but effective verification mechanism. We believe that the CD has the necessary experience and expertise to achieve this.

On the other hand, I have to emphasize that we do not perceive the opening of negotiations in the CD as an alternative to the Ottawa Process. We are of the opinion that these two processes should be complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Maybe I should recall at this stage the words of Mr. Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, who urged the CD to prove to those who do not believe that this Conference can deliver a treaty fast enough to meet the urgency of the humanitarian crisis that they are wrong.

(Mrs. Krásnohorská, Slovakia)

Before concluding, I should like to address another important issue, namely the expansion of the CD. As a country that has recent memories of being an observer, we are full of understanding for the cause of the applicant countries. Slovakia many times stated that, according to its belief, the CD should be open to every applicant. Having in mind these two facts, Slovakia fully supports the idea of nominating a special coordinator for CD expansion with a broad mandate to explore possible modalities and ways forward.

In conclusion I should like to stress once again that the time for bold moves by the CD and its member States is ripe. I wish you all success in your efforts, Mr. President.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Slovakia for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I recognize the representative of Finland. Ambassador Patokallio has the floor.

Mr. PATOKALLIO (Finland): Mr. President, let me begin my brief remarks by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. You can count on the full and active cooperation of my country in your important task.

My brief remarks will focus on one issue only: the issue of anti-personnel landmines. The issue of anti-personnel landmines has now been discussed within the Conference on Disarmament for several weeks. It is time to move from discussion to action. The international community is calling for concrete progress. The CD should respond to its call. The CD should prove to those who do not believe that this Conference can deliver the treaty fast enough to meet the urgency of the humanitarian crisis that they are wrong (and I am quoting the Australian Foreign Minister).

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland stated in her address at the United Nations General Assembly last fall that the Conference on Disarmament, as the single negotiating body for disarmament of the international community, is the most natural forum for negotiations on anti-personnel landmines. Clearly, an increasing number of delegations at this Conference share her view.

The objective for Finland has been and remains to establish without delay an ad hoc committee on anti-personnel landmines. Its task should be to negotiate a global, legally binding and verifiable ban on these weapons.

At the opening session of the CD in January, Finland proposed the appointment of a special coordinator for anti-personnel landmines. I wish to repeat this proposal. The intervening weeks have convinced us even more that the appointment of a special coordinator is the most realistic and effective means to come to an agreement on the establishment of the ad hoc committee and to start negotiations.

I would like to ask you, Mr. President, to seek agreement now on the appointment of the special coordinator. His or her job would be to explore the possibility of addressing the issue of anti-personnel landmines in the Conference.

(Mr. Patokallio, Finland)

We hope that you, Mr. President, could reach an agreement on the special coordinator if not today, then by the next plenary. The coordinator should address the mandate and other issues related to the establishment of the ad hoc committee. Finally, I want to underline the sense of urgency. I believe that the coordinator should be tasked to report to the Conference before Easter.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Finland for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I would ask again whether any other delegation wishes to take the floor at this stage.

As I announced earlier today, I should now like to take up for decision the requests received from Luxembourg and Kyrgyzstan to participate, as observers, in the work of the Conference during its 1997 session. These requests are contained in document CD/WP.485, which is before us. May I take it that the Conference agrees to these requests?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: As you are all aware, on Tuesday evening, I completed the round of bilateral consultations with members of the Conference, with a view to proceeding to the next step of our work following the adoption of the agenda for the session, namely to develop consensus on the organizational arrangements to deal with the issues that are before the Conference.

I am in the process of making a thorough assessment of these consultations, the outcome of which will be brought to the attention of the members of the Conference in an appropriate manner.

I have appreciated very much the open way in which delegations expressed their views. I am, therefore, most thankful for the spirit of cooperation and understanding displayed by all delegations.

The consultations proved to be useful, allowing me to see better where delegations stand as far as their positions on three important issues are concerned: namely, on nuclear disarmament, the fissile material cut-off treaty and anti-personnel landmines, as well as, in some cases, on other issues of major interest to them.

Interesting ideas and suggestions have been expressed. But the main lesson that I have learned is that more work is needed in order to make tangible progress. I am ready to continue my efforts to this end in a manner consistent with the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament.

This concludes my preliminary remarks on the bilateral consultations I held.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 6 March 1997 at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.